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A Walk through the Great Smoky Mountains

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Richard L. White

College: Business Administration Department: Accounting

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kenneth Wise

PROJECT TITLE: "A Walk through the Great Smoky Mountains"

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: , Faculty Mentor

Date: 12/01/00

Comments (Optional):

"A Walk through the Great Smoky Mountains"

Abstract

This project consists of three main sections that involve a hiking journal, supplementary trail information and research, and a slide show of pictures taken while hiking each of the trails. The writing of the journal was very time consuming because its contents detail many of my observations, thoughts, and insights while hiking. It specifically includes observations concerning the trails themselves, the views they afford, and even the people I spoke with on the trail. When the journal and the supplementary trail information are combined, their contents reach over 40 pages. The additional information provided in the project details some of the cultural, environmental, and geological history of the trails. Short anecdotes are also included that increase understanding of the importance and notoriety of each trail. Lastly, and perhaps the most interesting portion of the project, slide pictures are presented that give an up close view of the trails, their termination, and interesting sights. These three sections taken as a whole provide an excellent understanding of ten of the most famous hikes contained within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

However, as I have worked to provide at least a simple understanding of these trails and their histories, I have come to realize a much more important end. Throughout my years at the University of Tennessee I have always wanted to explore the treasures of the nearby Great Smoky Mountains National Park; however, it was not until this senior project that I was afforded such a comprehensive opportunity. The actual experiences of walking the trails and enjoying the park first hand have made the project worthwhile. There is nothing more relaxing than sitting on a mountaintop and knowing you are the only one for miles. The trails provide an escape from our hectic, busy lives. It is to this end that I hope this project encourages each person to spend a weekend exploring this vast wilderness and enjoying it to its fullest potential. It truly is a magnificent creation that is worth the trip. Therefore, I have included directions to these trails on a separate sheet and encourage anyone who has questions to speak with me at anytime.

Directions to Trails in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

1. **Abrams Falls Trail**
Follow Alcoa Highway (129) towards Maryville. When the highway splits, take Hwy. 321 towards Townsend. Drive through Townsend and continue for a few miles. Turn right onto the Laurel Creek Road (signs are posted) towards the Cades Cove Recreation Area. Follow Cades Cove Loop Road a few miles until a sign on the right denotes the parking area for the Abrams Falls Trail.
2. **Clingmans Dome**
Take I-40 East to exit 407 (Gatlinburg/Sevierville/Pigeon Forge). Turn right off the exit and continue until you reach US 441. Follow signs towards Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. Drive through Gatlinburg and past the Sugarlands Visitors Center and Park Headquarters. This road becomes Newfound Gap Road. Continue several miles until signs for the Clingmans Dome road appear on the right. Turn right on this road and follow for 7 miles to the parking area.
3. **Chimney Tops**
Take I-40 East to exit 407 (Gatlinburg/Sevierville/Pigeon Forge). Turn right off the exit and continue until you reach US 441. Follow signs towards Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. Drive through Gatlinburg and past the Sugarlands Visitors Center and Park Headquarters. This road becomes Newfound Gap Road. Continue several miles on this road and you will actually pass the Chimney Tops picnic area. Just about a mile past this area there is a parking area and signs for the Chimney Tops trailhead.
4. **Mount Sterling**
Take I-40 East to exit 451 (Waterville Road). Turn right off of the exit and follow this road to the first four way stop. Turn left here and you will be on old NC 284. Continue along this road for 6.7 miles. It is very slow going and you will feel like you will never get there.
5. **Charlies Bunion**
Same as directions to the Chimney Tops; however, you will pass the Chimneys and continue until you reach the signs for the Newfound Gap parking area. This area is on the left and provides an entrance to the Appalachian Trail.
6. **Mount LeConte**
Same as directions to the Chimney Tops; however, you will pass the Chimneys and continue until you reach the signs for the Alum Cave Bluffs parking area. This parking area is on the left and is usually teeming with cars and is very difficult to miss.
7. **Ramsey Cascades**
Follow above directions to Gatlinburg and then travel on US 321 5.9 miles out of the city. Enter the park on the Greenbriar road to the right. The road changes from paved to gravel. After 3.2 miles, a sign for Ramsey Cascades denotes a left turn over a small bridge. Continue along this road to the Ramsey Cascades parking area.
8. **Spence Field/Thunderhead**
Follow the directions to the Abrams Falls Trail; however, after turning onto the Laurel Creek Road, drive slowly and look to the left for the Lead Cove trailhead. There is an area large enough for two or three cars in front of the trail. This trail leads to the Bote Mountain Trail as well as the Appalachian Trail.
9. **Gregory Bald**
Follow the directions to Abrams Falls but pass this trailhead. After you reach the Cades Cove Visitors Center, turn right onto Forge Creek Road and then another right onto Parson Branch Road. This is a very rough gravel road. Exercise caution when driving on it. Continue several miles until you reach a parking area on the right and a trailhead on the left denoting the Gregory Bald Trail.
10. **Mount Cammerer**
Take I-40 East to Exit 443 (Foothills Parkway). Turn right off the exit until it ends at US 321/Route 32. Turn left on this road and continue south. US 321 turns right while 32 continues south. Stay on 32 towards the Cosby Campground area. Follow the remaining signs to the Cosby Campground and signs denote where the Low Gap Trail begins.

“A Walk through the Great Smoky Mountains”

Abrams Falls—8/19/00

Experience along the Trail:

This was actually a very tiring hike, not because of the trail or the grade, but because we coupled it with an eleven-mile bike ride around the Cades Cove Loop in the same day. This area of the park is very heavily traveled since cars are allowed to drive around the entire loop and enjoy the Cove; however, since we were at the parking grounds at 7:30 A.M., we were able to ride our bikes around the area and encountered less than five cars. About half way through the bike ride we arrived at the Abrams Falls parking area and hid our bikes in an area next to Abrams Creek. The Abrams Falls hike was very relaxing and enjoyable. The trees provided a lot of cover along the trail and the trail was taken care of very well. Compared with other trails I have visited in the Smokies, the Abrams Falls Trail seemed to be smoother for the most part and didn't have as many huge boulders. The trail provided some opportunities to see the underlying bedrock, which is Cades Sandstone. The hike to the falls was about 2.5 miles and was not strenuous at all. It was definitely a family-oriented hike that is short enough for everyone to enjoy. The trail was flat and actually bordered the Abrams Creek for much of the time. When we were very close to the falls, we could hear it but not really see much of it. This is because you must hike down a rather steep grade to get to the falls. Upon rounding our last turn on this short decline, we saw the beautiful falls as well as the broad pool that the falls flows into. At the falls there was a 20-foot plunge over sandstone rocks. There were plenty of areas around the falls to relax and take a break while sitting down. The

mist coming off of the falls was refreshing as we sat very close to the falls. My fiancée, Gabrielle, and I walked around the falls for a little while and took some pictures of the area as well as of the trail. The broad pool the falls flows into was probably over 100 feet across and would seem to be an excellent place to take a summer swim. Many people enjoy hiking to the falls and then jumping off the rocks along the edge of the water. Although this would have been a great sidetrack for us, we decided it was time to make our way back to the Cades Cove loop along the Abrams Falls Trail and back to our bikes. Upon making it back to the trailhead, we continued on our bike ride for about a mile and came upon the Cades Cove Visitor Center. This is a very nice area that provides a restroom as well as a gift shop for visitors to the park. Grassy fields abounded here and it was a very beautiful place. After about another hour of bike riding, we arrived at our original starting point and were done for the day. It was a very tiring day with 11 miles of bike riding and 5 miles of hiking. However, we finished in just over 3 hours and had plenty of time to enjoy the rest of the day.

Supplemental Trail Information

The Abrams Falls Trail follows along Abrams Creek, which is the largest stream completely within the boundaries of the park. "The name Abrams is a truncation of Abraham, the erstwhile chief of the Cherokees noted for his leadership in the last Indian attacks on the Watauga settlement." He presided over Chilhowee Village on the Little Tennessee River near the mouth of what is now called Abrams Creek (Wise 174). Additionally, The Abrams Falls trailhead is at the site of a former guest lodge operated by John Oliver in the 1920's. He was a direct descendant of John Oliver, the first white settler in Cades Cove (Defoe 40).

Clingmans Dome—9/4/00

Experience along the Trail:

This was another early morning trip with my fiancée. This was on my day off for Labor Day and we decided to make the best of the day by getting out and enjoying the mountains. However, once we arrived at our destination we realized everyone else seemed to have had the same idea. Upon arriving at the Clingmans Dome parking area, one of the main things that stood out was the plethora of dead trees all around the area. We found out that these were dead because of an exotic insect that had accidentally been carried over from Europe. It seemed almost eerie to see this many dead trees in such a dense area. Although these trees were an oddity, the view from even the base of the paved trail was beautiful. At the beginning of the trail there was a huge pile of boulders on which kids were climbing while their parents took pictures of them. It was certainly interesting to see all the many facets of this environment so closely packed together. As we began the trail, we saw the Forney Ridge Trail, which merged into the paved trail up to the Clingmans Dome observation tower. Gabrielle and I proceeded up the trail amidst many people. Lots of families were there pushing strollers and walking with small children. This really made me think about how livable of an area East Tennessee really is. It also gave me an appreciation for an area of Tennessee that I had really taken for granted for many years. One of the most interesting things we noticed was that there were numerous individuals and families that did not speak English. This seemed somewhat odd in Tennessee because the state is not generally known for its diversity; however, along the paved trail we heard numerous languages spoken from many people. Some of this diversity may be owed to that fact that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the most visited national parks in the United States. We found this

particularly interesting. We started up the paved trail in the morning amidst large crowds. Most people were walking rather slowly, but we needed to move on because we had planned another hike directly following this venture to the top of Clingmans Dome. We made it to the top of the trail in only about 10 minutes. The hike was steep at points, but because the trail was paved the climb was very bearable. As we continued to walk, we noticed even more dead fir trees as well as rock formations. Once we arrived at the top, we saw an observation tower with a spiraling ramp to the top. This is particularly useful because it affords access to all people, including those who are handicapped, to a view from the highest point in the Smokies. Gabrielle and I decided to walk up to the top of the tower; however, the view was almost completely obstructed by mist which so often prevents any view from the tower. It was surprisingly very cold at this elevation since we were only wearing shorts and t-shirts. Different signs affixed to the rails of the tower showed views from the tower on a clear day and allow hikers to know what peaks they are looking at in the distance. On a clear day it is possible to see much of the Park, including major peaks such as LeConte, the Chimneys, and Charlie's Bunion, from this vantagepoint. Although we were somewhat disappointed in our view or lack thereof, from the top, we decided to press on and made our way back down the tower and onto the trail again. The walk down was extremely short as we were stopping for nothing. We reached the parking area in what seemed like only 5 minutes and we were on our way again back down the mountains and towards Gatlinburg. We had another hike to do that day and it would be much more strenuous.

Supplemental Trail Information

There is actually more than one way to get to the top of Clingmans Dome. Although most people walk along the paved trail, more adventurous hikers oftentimes take the Clingmans Dome Bypass Trail. This short trail is most often used as an access trail from the Forney Ridge parking area to the Appalachian Trail. This trail is definitely a way to avoid the crowds along the paved trail that leads to the summit. One of the most famed stretches of the Appalachian Trail is the section near Clingmans Dome. Clingmans Dome is actually the highest peak along the entire trail, which stretches from Maine to Georgia. The section of the Appalachian Trail contained in the Smokies is also distinctive because it boasts the longest section, 34 miles, of the entire trail over 5,000 ft. Lastly, the Appalachian Trail is also the only trail in the entire park marked by blazes—the white rectangles painted on trees or rocks.

Chimneys—9/4/00

Experience along the Trail:

After our short hike up to the observation tower at Clingmans Dome, we decided we would try to hike one more trail before we were done for the day. We drove from the Clingmans Dome parking area to the Chimney Tops Trailhead, only about 10 miles away. The Chimney Tops trail is very popular because of its proximity to Knoxville and the view from the top of the Chimneys. Most people simply park along the side of the road because the parking area is usually full. We parked and made our way to the trailhead. Immediately after starting along the trail we walked over a relatively new bridge that crossed the Walker Camp Prong of the Little Pigeon River. On this particular day there was an abundance of people along the trail and actually playing on the rocks in the river. The first section of the trail was fairly flat and quite beautiful. The trail meandered along a stream and was covered by overhanging

trees. After making a hairpin turn to the left, we started up a slight grade along a relatively smooth trail. Along the first part of the trail there were four bridges that had to be crossed. After crossing the last bridge half way up to the Chimneys, you approach a junction with the Road Prong Trail and you continue right. After this junction, the trail becomes considerably more difficult as the grade sharply increases. The trail becomes rocky at about the same time it becomes very steep. I would definitely recommend that anyone choosing to make this hike carry lots of water and juice. The climb is somewhat exhausting and you will definitely be very thirsty near the top. We took a couple of pictures of the trail itself as we ascended towards the Chimney Tops. It is particularly rocky in places and seems to never end its ascent. After the seemingly endless ascent, the trail becomes less steep and is much more level. The trail narrows and winds around a few more curves until you approach a mass of tangled roots. After you navigate your way through these roots you approach a massive rock face. Since we had hiked this trail before, we decided not to scale the face of the rocks and instead made our way up a side trail to the top of the Chimneys. It is worthy to note, however, that climbing the face of the rocks is a very enjoyable experience that can oftentimes provide quite an adrenaline rush. The climb is not very difficult, but it is advisable to be very careful. It would be very difficult to live through such a fall. Most people do not have any problem with this climb though. After reaching the top of the rocks, you are on top of the larger of the two Chimneys. The rock slate you are actually standing on, which is the Chimneys, is actually part of a rock formation that extends all the way to Charlie's Bunion. These formations are rarely exposed in the Smokies and are usually covered by moss and trees. At the top of the Chimneys it is possible to see what the mountains really look like under all the green covering. They are rocky, rigid, and jagged. The view from the top of the Chimneys is quite magnificent. From the top there is a little

path that you must climb down on treacherous rocks to get to. This path leads to the other Chimney. Seeking some adventure, Gabrielle and I decided to climb down the rocks and make our way to the other Chimney Top. I had never done this before but had heard that most of the paths leading to the top of the other Chimney had been closed because of injuries and fatalities to visitors trying to climb the trails and other rocky faces. Other than a few precarious situations, the climb to the other Chimney was not bad and afforded us a different view of the taller Chimney. We took pictures from this vantagepoint and enjoyed the time we were able to have alone on the other peak. It was getting late in the afternoon and we decided to make our way back to the original Chimney Top and then back to the parking area. We saw a few small trails that deviated from our original path to the smaller Chimney. They seemed to point us in the right direction and so we took them. These trails were somewhat treacherous and I would not recommend them. The soil there is so shallow because of the underlying rock that many times we would step and the soil would begin to slide. Luckily for us, the places where this happened were relatively safe and did not put us in harm's way. We climbed through a maze of thick roots and found our way back towards the original path. The walk down from the Chimneys was enjoyable and we passed many different types of people along the way. We saw a pregnant woman and her husband as well as an older couple who were enjoying the afternoon. Once again I realized just how accessible the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is to most everyone. The trip down was enjoyable yet at times hazardous because of the rockiness of the trail. We reached the parking area in less than an hour after we departed from the top. It had been a long but enjoyable day hiking in the Smokies. Since these hikes were done on a holiday, they were much more crowded than usual; however, the Clingmans Dome Trail and the Chimney

Tops Trail are two of the most popular trails in the entire park and are oftentimes heavily traveled.

Supplemental Trail Information

The area around the Chimney Tops is actually an old-growth forest that escaped much of the logging that was prevalent in the early 20th century in the area that became the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Champion Fibre Company owned much of the land in this area, while other portions of it were privately owned. Before the company had the opportunity to start logging, the land was condemned for park purchase. Luckily, these developments allowed for the forest to stay more naturally intact than many of the other parts of the park (Defoe 169).

From points along the trail, it is possible to see many of the most famous peaks in the Smokies. At one point during the trail, it is possible to see Mt. LeConte, towering over most other peaks around it. Concerning the geology of the trail, the rock face that makes up the Chimney Tops is actually part of the Anakeesta Formation, which is exposed in outcrops like the Chimneys and Charlie's Bunion. Anakeesta metamorphic slate is believed to be at least 600 million years old by most geologists. It is believed to have been laid down during the Pre-Cambrian Era (Defoe 171).

A more recent history of the Chimney Tops relates to the Cherokees and early white settlers. The Cherokee name for the Chimney Tops was *duniskwalguni* meaning "forked antlers," perhaps a reference to the Cherokees' understanding of the mountains as being two peaks with a common base. The white mountaineers gave the modern designation of Chimney Tops or Chimneys. The hole near the top of the Chimneys emphasizes the name (Wise 71).

It is advisable to be very cautious when at the summit of the Chimney Tops; there are actually Chimney Holes that have caused serious injury to many careless hikers. This portion of the National Park, the Sugarlands, is visible from this peak. It can easily be seen why it is considered by many to be the most beautiful part of the Park (Defoe 171).

Mount Sterling—9/8/00

Experience along the Trail:

This hike was planned to be a rather short one that could be accomplished in just a few hours. I have actually been up to Mount Sterling before along the Baxter Creek Trail as well as the Big Creek/Swallow Fork Trail route; however, this day my fiancée, Gabrielle, and I decided to hike up the Mount Sterling Trail, which is the most common way to reach the summit of the mountain. We reached the turnoff to go to the trailhead early in the morning. After you drive for a couple of miles on paved roads towards the Big Creek Parking Area, you turn off onto a gravel road that carries you across the North Carolina State line. The road was quite precarious at times and seemed to have a never-ending amount of switchbacks. On our way up the mountain it seemed as though the ascension never ended. One interesting note is that we found ourselves out in the middle of nowhere and then we happened to see four or five houses along this road. It seemed odd that someone would live so far out into the wilderness, but the peacefulness of the area could not be denied. After about 30 minutes of driving on the gravel road, we reached the trailhead. The trail appeared to be an old jeep trail because it was quite wide. From the first steps

of the trail, the uphill grade was somewhat severe. It was very cool this morning and more clothes than the t-shirt and umbros I had on would have been nice. We started up the trail and continued for over an hour without taking a break. Our maps said that we had 2.8 miles to go to the top of Mount Sterling, where there is a Lookout Tower and Campsite #38. The trail was interesting because it was relatively easy to hike for most of the time. The trail is well graded even though it is very steep. Most of the beginnings of the trail are covered with large trees. This made it even cooler on this early morning hike, since we were shaded from nearly all sunlight. We were able to see some blackberry plants that seemed to be just out of season.

Apparently, it had rained in the area because as we approached the top of the Ridge, there were many mudholes we had to maneuver around. After we had hiked about 2.3 miles, we turned right as we reached the beginning of the Mount Sterling Ridge Trail. By looking at the tracks along the wet parts of the trail leading to the top, it was clear that deer had been in the area recently. We also increasingly saw horse hooves as we neared the top of the Mountain. Right before the clearing at the top of Mount Sterling, there was a place to tie off horses. We continued up the trail and reached a clearing that is actually Campsite #38. There is also a very tall fire tower that you are able to climb. We decided to walk up the many steps to the top of the tower to view the area around Mount Sterling. The view was magnificent. We actually climbed up into the small area at the top of the tower (it is usually locked and it is illegal to sleep in it) and looked out the windows. This vantagepoint afforded us a 360-degree view. After looking from the top and taking a few pictures, we decided to explore the area and the campsite. The campsite is very well kept and has a pulley system to hang backpackers' packs up to prevent them from being ravaged by bears or other wildlife. There are numerous small tributary trails that lead into the woods from the campsite. If you continue along the Baxter Creek Trail (which would

lead to the Big Creek Parking Area), there is a water source about 0.3 miles along the trail on the left. After we explored and looked around the area for a few minutes, we decided to make the journey down the mountain. It was much easier returning to our truck since we were walking downhill nearly the whole time. We continued down the rest of the trail and did not see one person along the trail the entire day. It is definitely a peaceful area that is much less traveled than some of the more tourist-oriented hikes.

Supplemental Trail Information

The Great Smoky Mountains form a rugged barrier between western North Carolina and east Tennessee. This barrier has influenced travel, transportation, settlement patterns, and even politics. Subsequently, the infrequent gaps in the Smokies have figured prominently in the area's regional history. The Mount Sterling Gap is one of the most historic in the Smokies. It is believed that buffalo probably traveled along the area in prehistoric times seeking an easy route to pastures. The Indians also traveled in this area as they made their way from Tennessee to North Carolina and vice versa. Methodist Missionary Bishop Francis Asbury crossed at Mount Sterling Gap in 1810 on one of his many missions. He remarked at how high the mountains were in this area and how they seemed to continue on for miles. Parts of the route were improved as a cattle route in the 1820's. At that time, the crest of the mountain was much more open than it is today and allowed sufficient grazing land.

Early settlers in the Mount Sterling area recognized that Indians had been in the area long before they settled. Along a hunter's trail on the ridge of Mount Sterling, settlers found a one-acre clearing with Indian campsites and fireplaces. Settlers who resided in this area referred to the fields on top of Mount Sterling as Near Old Indian Field or

Far Old Indian Field. The area also took on importance during the Civil War (Defoe 422). Many troops from both armies were deployed throughout this gap. During the Civil War, Cataloochee and the Mount Sterling Gap Area offered refuge to deserters and fugitives intent on hiding out until the war ended. It was through Mount Sterling Gap, the point of greatest vulnerability into western North Carolina, that the infamous raiders Captain Albert Teague and Colonel George W. Kirk led detachments of soldiers seeking out deserters and enemy sympathizers, while looting farms and houses (Wise 276). Additionally, in April 1865, Colonel George W. Kirk led a Federal force from Newport, Tennessee through Mount Sterling Gap to Haywood County as part of a three-pronged thrust into western North Carolina. The assault was repelled and the troops were driven back into Tennessee.

Later, in 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps' Big Creek Camp erected the 60-foot steel fire tower on the crest of Mount Sterling. They also built a sturdy log cabin for the fire warden. (Defoe 424). Today, at the top of the mountain is a clearing that is now known as Campsite #38; however, it was known by the Indians as the "Devils Bedchamber" (Wise 277)

Charlie's Bunion (Appalachian Trail)—9/9/00

Experience along the Trail:

Since I have come to UT I have heard so many great stories about Charlie's Bunion. It is one of the most visited sites along the Appalachian Trail and is heralded by many as the best view in the Smokies. Early on a Saturday morning my fiancée, Gabrielle Richey, and my best friend and best man in my wedding in December, Brian Andrews, set out on a long day of hiking. We had decided to get up very early

in the morning and hike 15.6 or so miles that day. I had never actually hiked that much in one day and so I knew the trip would be very challenging. We drove two cars because we did not plan on making a loop that day. We parked the first car at the Alum Cave Bluffs Trailhead and then continued towards the trailhead at Newfound Gap where most people access Charlie's Bunion. We arrived at Newfound Gap minutes after dropping the first car off. This area is off of Newfound Gap Road, which is commonly called US 441. The parking area at Newfound Gap was actually crowded with cars as we approached. Many visitors as well as tourists come to this point because there is a spectacular view of the Gap. However, we decided to forego this view in favor of the one at Charlie's Bunion. We started along the Appalachian Trail up a slight grade. From the beginning the trail was relatively rocky and had many roots along it. However, the trail is very well taken care of because it is one of the most frequently used by visitors to the park. It was very wide and seemed fairly stable. The trail continued uphill for a good while. Although the trail was not ridiculously steep, it was a very gradual climb to Charlie's Bunion along the Appalachian Trail that we knew we would feel later in the day as we climbed to the summit Mount LeConte. Along the trail we also noticed what seemed to be hundreds of dead trees. From other readings, we had learned that the Fraser firs have been destroyed by a non-native insect called the balsam woolly adelgid. A great number of the trees we saw were basically bare trunks. We then continued along the trail for nearly two miles until we saw a trail going to the right that is known as Sweat Heifer Creek Trail. This trail actually leads down to a shelter where hikers can stay. We stayed, though, on the AT and continued another mile until we encountered another trail, the Boulevard Trail. This trail leads to the summit of Mount LeConte, although it is not nearly as heavily traveled as other routes to the summit. Almost immediately after passing the Boulevard Trail, we started to

descend along a rocky trail that had a small trickle of water running through it. We looked off to the right and saw a clearing. We decided to investigate further and saw there was a shelter with a sign on it. We had arrived at the Icewater Spring Shelter. The shelters are very interesting because they are nothing more than a three-sided cabin with two level surfaces on which hikers can sleep. What made this stop so interesting and at the same time sad was that someone had apparently tied two dogs to the posts of the shelter and had left them. We happened upon a few other hikers who said that the owner was out hiking and had been contacted and told he should pick up his dogs. The dogs actually had radio collars and seemed quite dehydrated. We gave them some water and were able to untie them and place them in an area out of the direct sunlight. We decided there was nothing else we could do and pressed on. The next part of the trail was relatively rough and it is definitely recommended that you hike in sturdy boots along this stretch. About three quarters of the way between the Boulevard Trail and Charlie's Bunion there is a majestic view off to the left of the mountains. It was a very clear day and it seemed as though we could see everything. We continued just a little bit further and reached what seemed to be a small clearing. It appeared that the AT continued to the right, but there was a small trail leading up a rather steep embankment to the left. We decided this had to be Charlie's Bunion and chose to make the ascent. The trail near Charlie's Bunion was very precarious and appeared to simply end before you reach the summit. However, there is a small path to the right that is hardly noticeable as you start up this little trail. We chose to take this path and started climbing hand over hand along it. It was very steep and slippery at times. After only about a minute of climbing we reached the summit. There are large rocks here that show the underlying spine of the Great Smoky Mountains. This appears to be one of the few places in the Smokies (like the Chimneys) where it is possible to see the underlying rock

formations that make up the Smokies. As I stood upon the highest point at Charlie's Bunion I was amazed. The area below the Bunion was beautiful from where we were standing. We could see the summit of Mount LeConte as well as many other places. It was as though everything was green in every direction we looked. However, we did look towards Mount LeConte and saw two landslides. It was very odd to see this because everything else was so green. Apparently, the soil in this area was so thin that no trees or shrubs could grow. Erosion is definitely a major problem and a solution must be found if the slide is to be kept from growing in size. We walked around along the top of the Bunion for a while and relaxed. It was still very early in the morning (probably before 9:30 A.M.) and we knew we had much farther to go. As a side note, there is actually another way to reach the top of Charlie's Bunion; however, this entails not turning off along the little path to the right and instead rock climbing to the top of the summit. Although this is definitely doable for anyone in good shape, it is probably not advisable, especially if a backpack is taken. We descended to the trail the same way we went up and made our way back to the AT. Upon reaching the juncture of our small trail and the AT, we came upon four middle-aged men who were carrying very large backpacks. They stopped to speak with us and asked about the Bunion. In conversation we found out that they were all hiking the entire Appalachian Trail together and had until Christmas to finish. Unfortunately for them, hiking through parts of Pennsylvania and Maine in December would be very tough. Also, it appeared that they would definitely have to pick up the pace to complete their goal in time—they were not even close to half way and most people take six months to hike the entire AT. From there we hiked back up the AT and the rocky part of the trail we had descended previously. We passed the Icewater Shelter again and checked on the dogs. They seemed to be doing fine and so we continued on our way towards the Boulevard Trail, which we would use to

make our way to the summit of Mount LeConte. When we reached the Boulevard Trail, we knew we had already completed 6.1 miles, which was over a third of our total hike.

Supplemental Trail Information

“The idea of an Appalachian Trail was first proposed in 1921 by Benton MacKaye, a trained forester and regional planner from Massachusetts.” He envisioned a long trail stretching the full length of the Appalachian skyline. At the time of his proposal, many of the highest peaks in the south, especially those in the eastern part of the Smokies, were largely unknown because of the tremendous overgrowth of the forest. Notable explorers, like Swiss Arnold Guyot, had journeyed to these less-traveled areas and attested to the rugged nature of the terrain (Wise 199).

In the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Appalachian Trail is not one of the most heavily traveled trails, although it is probably the best known. This is usually because it lies deep in the park and isn't very accessible to day hikers. The one part of the Appalachian Trail that is an exception is the area at Newfound Gap that ends at Charlie's Bunion. The trail is intersected by Newfound Gap Road, one of the most visited parts of the park. The four-mile section of the Appalachian Trail leading to Charlie's Bunion was built in the fall of 1932 under the supervision of Sheridan West, a National Park Service Engineer, and 22 crewmen. The crew began work on September 5th and finished on October 6th. All of the work was done by hand using picks and shovels. According to Park Archives, this trail was the first development in the park for the benefit of the public and was built from the \$509,000 allotted the park from the emergency relief bill passed in Congress in June 1931 (Defoe 57).

What was once a dense barrier of Fraser fir that made for a cool, dark hike with only occasional views is now a forest in transition. Thousands of skeletal, bare trunks dominate. About 1.5 miles along the trail towards Charlie's Bunion there is a small spur trail that provides views to the north. This site is obviously used as an illegal campsite at times as evidenced by the trash and fire pit. This section of the trail is also home to many wild hogs. Although it is very rare to see one of these animals (which is a good thing), you can see the destruction they bring as they root around for food. The areas that look like they have been churned up by a garden tiller are evidence of the problem. After reaching the Boulevard Trail at 2.7 miles, you only have to hike another 0.2 miles until you come upon the Icewater Shelter. This shelter is typical of those along the Appalachian Trail with one exception: a compost privy has been constructed to help alleviate the impact of humans. This shelter is heavily used. At the shelter there is a sign advising campers and hikers to treat all water that is taken from the spring just a few hundreds yards away. This spring provides very cool water but is probably suspect because so many individuals illegally camp at sites just above the water source. The next portion of the trail is a descent that goes through a gully that has been created by thousands of footsteps as well as rain. At this point you are walking on cobblestones and most people sound like a horse because they plod over the stones (Defoe 59).

The Appalachian Trail straddles the state lines of North Carolina and Tennessee as it approaches Charlie's Bunion. But, before reaching the Bunion, the forest changes very dramatically. The change in the forest is the result of two catastrophes: one natural and one man-caused. In their haste to clear-cut Smokies timber, early twentieth century loggers left the slash, or piles of brush and limbs culled from timber, in place. In 1925, a particularly vicious slash fire swept up the drainage of Kephart

Prong, consuming over four hundred acres of woodland. The fire left the precipitous western escarpment of the Smokies void of vegetation. That was the initial, man-made catastrophe. A natural event followed that and created one of the most spectacular bluffs in the Appalachians. In 1929, a cloudburst scoured the veneer of soil from the exposed slopes, clogging area rivers with soil, trees, and rock. A local outdoorsman and well-known local writer, Horace Kephart, assembled a crew to survey the damage. A local mountaineer named Charlie Conner accompanied him. They were awed by the destruction and felt the area deserved some name. Kephart likened the knobby appearance of the cliffs to Charlie Conner's bunion. In an interview later Charlie Conner said he had no recollection of hobbling along on a bunion but did experience some sort of foot problem that day. Kephart, who promoted the establishment of the park and was on the committee charged with establishing place names, jumped at the opportunity to immortalize Conner and his ailment. This is how Charlie's Bunion received its name.

The craggy face of Charlie's Bunion is unique in comparison to other cliffs in the Appalachians (Defoe 60). Standing on top on Charlie's Bunion and looking into the ravine below, one will notice a "naked, razor thin spine extending like a buttress between the base of the Bunion and a small knob. The sides of the spine are extremely steep, falling sharply away to the ravine below. Altogether it is an unparalleled example of the underlying ruggedness of the Smokies" (Wise 201). Since Charlie's Bunion is easily reached by way of Newfound Gap, it is usually teeming with day hikers. A few of them who were careless have actually fallen to their deaths. One should explore the Bunion with caution (Defoe 60).

Experience along the Trail:

After making it back from Charlie's Bunion, the three of us headed towards Mt. LeConte via the Boulevard Trail. Although most people haven't heard of this trail, it really is very pretty and a relatively easy way to reach the summit of LeConte as opposed to the more popular Alum Cave Trail. Although we had already walked over 6 miles when we reached the Boulevard Trail, we were in good spirits because it was still very early and we all felt very good. We proceeded along the trail, which at first was relatively easier than we expected. Much of the beginning of the trail was covered and because it was still early was rather cool. As we continued along the trail we noticed a lot of fallen trees. There were also the patches of dead trees that we have seen throughout the park. As we continued even further we seemed to be getting away from the scenic views and more into the dense forest. However, after a couple of more miles and some short water breaks, we rounded a corner and saw a beautiful view of Mount LeConte. This was actually one of my first times to see the peak since I had rarely been anywhere near the depths of the park. From my first viewpoint of the peak, I saw a few landslides that appeared to be quite dangerous. They looked as though they were made up of dry, sandy dirt that simply had been eroded over time. Little to no vegetation was present in these areas because there was not enough soil to support any kind of root system. We continued on and turned back away from the views and into the forest again. As we walked along the steep edge of the trail, we saw ahead of us a huge slide of rock that came onto the trail. The rocks were all very blue and strewn out on the trail. Additionally, a large, dead tree had nearly rolled onto the trail when it had fallen. We talked about these interesting sights over a water break. As we continued along the trail, we knew we were getting closer and as we began to climb our inclinations were proven to be

correct. I knew from looking at a trail map that the last mile of the trail would be quite difficult. We continued climbing and found ourselves on the side of a mountain. The trail also began to get very narrow in places as we approached what appeared to be a landslide. We approached the slide with caution because the trail was very narrow and the ground was unsteady. Luckily, there were little chains that were bolted into the side of the mountain to aid us in our ascent. Without the chains, it could have been quite scary along this portion of the trail. However, we made it past the slide and continued to make our climb. We passed a few hikers and began to approach a thicket of trees. After just a few more minutes of hiking, we came to a sign that directed us either to Myrtle Point or the LeConte Lodge. Since we were very tired and were ready to eat lunch, we decided to forgo the view from the point and started hiking towards the lodge. We hiked along and came to a beautiful clearing. We took many pictures from this vantagepoint because the view was absolutely clear and unobstructed. We passed the shelter that is at Mount LeConte. This structure looks very old but when called upon it serves its purpose of sheltering hikers from the weather. After passing the shelter we walked just a few more paces and reached the LeConte Lodge. There were many little cabins and a dining hall and what appeared to be an administrator's lodge. We decided to enter what appeared to be the official station and sat down at one of the tables inside. It was very cool on top of the mountain but simply sitting down made us feel wonderful. Inside the lodge were dining tables, board games, and t-shirts for sale. The three of us sat and enjoyed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We noticed it was only 12:30 P.M. and realized we had hiked at a torrid pace. We sat and talked for a while but decided we were ready to make the long descent back to Newfound Gap Road. We started down the Alum Cave Trail. The trail was very steep and we encountered numerous other individuals and groups hiking up to the summit. As we began the trail we noticed a

forest that seemed so thick that you couldn't see 10 feet into it. It was quite an interesting sight. We continued down the trail at a very rapid pace—partly because we were in a hurry to get home and partly because the trail was so steep. There were some very interesting portions of the trail that were extremely narrow and could have been dangerous. On one section of the trail, it appeared that half of the trail had fallen off of a ledge because the ground simply gave way. In another portion of the trail, we turned towards the mountain and made our way down what seemed to be a small staircase between two rock walls. This was one of the most interesting parts of the trail because it was almost necessary to crouch in order to make it down the small staircase, which was aided by a handrail. As we continued down the trail we encountered many interesting sights. Another one of the most memorable sights was the Alum Cave Bluffs. It appeared as though the area around the bluffs had been dug out and mined. The area near the bluffs was slick because the area we walked on wasn't really dirt—it appeared to be some sort of mineral. Another small staircase aided us in our descent here and we continued along the trail. As we continued along the last leg of the trail, we were utterly exhausted from our long day hike. As we approached the end of the trail, we saw a few families hiking along the trail with their small children. We stopped to speak with them for a while and asked them if they were really planning on letting their children hike to the top. They were quite nice and told us they usually just hike until the children are tired, then they return. We wished them well and went on our way towards the road. At the sight of the cars, my feet rejoiced because 15.6 miles in one day had taken its toll on them. We reached the jeep and returned to the other car we had left at Newfound Gap. Our legs as well as the rest of our bodies were tired, but we all had a great time.

Supplemental Trail Information

The Boulevard Trail is distinguished "as the trail that follows the spine of the ridge between Mount Kephart and Mount LeConte." Five or ten minutes after the beginning of this trail, there is a small trail to the side that is called the Jumpoff, a 1000 foot vertical cliff that overlooks very rugged scenery.

The Jumpoff affords views of Charlies Bunion, the Sawteeth, and Mount Guyot. This place serves as the vantagepoint from Mount Kephart, since there is not a view from the top of this mountain (Wise 40). A word of warning should be given: this trail is very rough and the one mile loop should definitely be done only when one knows there is plenty of time to reach his or her destination after this detour.

Concerning the actual Boulevard Trail, its altitude never drops below 5500'. As one continues along the trail, it crosses a small stream called Walker Camp Prong.

Along the trail there are multiple overlooks that are visible, or just barely visible from the trees. A diverse group of trees grows along the trail. Among the groups of trees along the trail are pin cherry, American mountain-ash, Fraser fir, red spruce, and yellow birch. Along several places of the trail it is possible to see uprooted spruce and Fraser fir trees. By looking at the roots and the soil it is easy to see why—these trees have a shallow root system (Defoe 133).

As the trail continues, it begins to ascend and crest a ridge known as Anakeesta Ridge. There is a ledge called Anakeesta Formation that is made up of bluegray, hard, slate-like rock. The rock is actually called Anakeesta Formation because it was first defined there. Throughout this formation there is something known as fool's gold. The Formation contains iron sulfide. When excavation (such as road construction) or a landslide exposes it to oxygen and fresh rain water, one of the results of the chemical reaction is weak sulfuric acid. In the 1970's, a landslide on

the southwest flank of the Boulevard Trail, in the Huggins Hell area, released so much sulfuric acid into Alum Cave Creek that it lowered the pH of the water to the degree that trout could not live in it. The acid water either killed or drove the trout down into Walker Camp Prong. It was years before trout returned to the stream in significant numbers.

As one continues along the trail, it crosses Alum Gap and Myrtle Point and the Alum Cave Bluffs come into view. Along the final ascent to the summit of Mount LeConte, hundreds of dead trees stand like sticks in the view. These are Fraser firs that were killed by the non-native balsam woolly adelgids (Defoe 134). Finally, after this last brutal climb, one reaches the summit of Mount LeConte. There are four small peaks atop Mount LeConte--High Top, Myrtle Point, West Point, and Cliff Tops. "Cliff Top and Myrtle Point afford two of the finest vantage points in the Smokies." Clingmans Dome, Silers Bald, Thunderhead Mountain, and the twin peaks of the Chimneys are visible from Cliff Top. The uppermost point of Mount LeConte is High Top, 6,593 feet above sea level (Wise 41). Continuing along the trail, it passes the Mount LeConte shelter and then approach the group of buildings known as the LeConte Lodge.

One of the most popular routes to and from Mount LeConte is the Alum Cave Trail. This trail probably has the most spectacular scenery of any trail in the park. "It boasts Arch Rock and Alum Cave Bluffs, dramatic landslide scars of the flanks of the mountain, excellent views of the West Prong and Little Pigeon River Gorge, and cove hardwood and highlands old-growth forest." The Alum Cave Bluffs mark the half-way point along the trail. The minerals in the bluff include sulfides and saltpeter, substances essential to the production of gunpowder. Dr. John Mingus and other early settlers started the Epsom Salts Manufacturing Company in the 1830's to

exploit the bluff's minerals. However, there is no indication that actual mining ever occurred. Before that, during the Civil War, Confederate Colonel William Thomas, leading a group of soldiers composed mostly of Cherokees, built a road to Alum Cave Bluffs. Believing the minerals in the bluff to be a vital strategic resource, he built a small stockade called Fort Harry near the Chimney Tops to protect his crude mines. Although there are no records that mining ever occurred, log hoppers and vats were still present there in the early 1900's (Defoe 50).

Many other treasures await a hiker as he or she continues along the Alum Cave Trail. After crossing Styx Branch on a foot bridge, rhododendron and old-growth hardwoods are present. Additionally, Arch Rock is near this area. It is a small passageway leading through steep sloped rock. As one continues long the trail, a massive slide of trees, rock, and trees is present. On the evening of June 28, 1993, a deluge centered in Huggins Hill removed part of the mountain. "The slide scoured the mountain to its bedrock skeleton, removing a section of mountain over 0.25 mile long and 20' deep." The trail continues along a stream called Styx Branch. The trail crosses over this stream once. Lastly, when descending the final mile, the trail crosses the Walker Camp Prong and Alum Cave Creek Bridges, finally ending at a parking area along the Newfound Gap Road (Defoe 48)

Ramsay Cascades—10/6/00

Experience along the Trail:

Early one Saturday morning my fiancée and I decided to go hiking. Since she lives in Morristown, which is relatively close to Greenbrier, we decided to hike Ramsay Cascades. Greenbrier is an area near Sevierville off of Highway 411. It didn't take

us too long to arrive at Greenbrier and we turned into the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We drove along a paved road for a while and then turned off onto a gravel road. It looked as if it would rain on this day, so we didn't expect to see anyone. Much to our surprise, when we arrived at the parking area, it was nearly full with cars. We readied our camera as well as ourselves for the hike and started along the trail. The trail was very wide at the start and was slightly uphill, however it was not too difficult. It was apparent that originally the trail was used for jeeps. Additionally, along the beginnings of the trail there are numerous little sitting benches that have been constructed from logs. Although we didn't actually try them, there were about five of them. The trail was very pretty and near the beginning of the trail we crossed a small stream over a foot bridge. Along the trail, I noticed a lot of very large trees. After about one and a half miles, the jeep trail seemed to end and there was a turnaround. We continued along the Ramsay Cascades Trail into the forest. It was a very pretty beginning of this new trail because it was completely covered and provided a picturesque view. We continued along the trail, which runs to the right of a stream where Ramsay Prong meets Middle Prong. The trail had many exposed roots that were quite an obstacle for us during our hike. Additionally, after we had completed about three miles, it seemed as if the trail would never end, especially since it began to get steeper. One of the main observations we made on this day were the number of large, old trees along all portions of the trail. The presence of these large trees continued even as we approached the cascades. During the last stretch of the trail, we could hear the waterfall but could not see anything. One of the most interesting things about the trail was the number of stair steps that seemed to have been built specifically for hikers. Although these helpful additions were welcome at times, they made the trail seem to be even more strenuous as we approached our destination. We continued to hear the waterfall and

felt as if we were being led on a never-ending journey; however, much to our enjoyment we rounded another corner and there was the beautiful waterfall. I had read earlier that Ramsay Cascades was the largest waterfall in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It definitely did not disappoint either one of us. The waterfall itself was very beautiful, although the water seemed to be quite low. There was a large group of people at the falls enjoying lunch and a relaxing evening. Unfortunately, since it was overcast and appeared as if it would rain, it was very cold at the falls because of the mist coming from the splashing water. One word of warning everyone should note is that climbing on this particular waterfall is very dangerous. Before you reach the actual falls, there is a sign warning hikers to refrain from climbing because four people have died from falling off of the slippery rocks. We decided it would be best not to climb, but wanted to get a closer look. We walked across some rocks to the other side of the falls and sat down to enjoy lunch. We enjoyed about fifteen minutes of solitude away from the crowds on the other side. We took some pictures and finished lunch quickly because it was getting very cold and looked as if it was going to rain. We jumped across the rocks back to the trail and started the return hike. The large group had started down the trail before us, but we passed them quickly as we attempted to gain some warmth through picking up our pace. We continued down the stair steps and on down the trail. We made our way down the steep portion of the trail that we had struggled up less than an hour before. The covered trail blocked out all of the sunlight, keeping it relatively cool during our return hike. After less than an hour of hiking, we found ourselves back at the wide jeep trail. We admired the streams that were to our left this time and continued towards the parking area along the wide trail. We saw more people on our hike down who had just begun the hike. It was very interesting because all sorts of people were out enjoying the wilderness this day. An elderly couple was

enjoying the hike, all be it at a somewhat slower pace. A college class was walking up the trail when we passed them on our way up, and they were sitting down and speaking about the trees and wildlife when we came back down. We also noticed two young parents with their small child. It was so great to see so many different people who were obviously in different stages of life enjoying the mountains and the Park itself. We finally made our way back to the original foot bridge that we had crossed only a couple of hours earlier. We crossed and made our way to the trailhead, just a short walk from the parking area. We passed another couple who were beginning the trail just as we finished. It was actually beginning to sprinkle as we got to the parking area and climbed into my truck. Fortunately, we were finally done and had missed any chance of getting soaked.

Supplemental Trail Information

"The most spectacular display of water anywhere in the Smokies is Ramsay Cascades, four miles above Greenbrier Cove on the Ramsay Prong of the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon River." The first stretch of the Ramsay Cascades trail is a portion of the Ramsay Prong Road, which is no longer in use. This road terminates about 1.5 miles up the trail and the rest of the trail to Ramsay Cascades continues as merely a footpath (Wise 22).

Ramsay Cascades trail actually provides two types of hiking—easy road hiking along the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon River and then harder, narrow trail hiking along the Ramsay Prong. The early settlers also noticed this and therefore cut most of the mature forest along the Middle Prong and saved the rest for later. "Fortunately, by the time Champion Fibre Company had bought the land and planned access railroads to harvest Eastern hemlocks and red spruce, the national park took over."

Some local settlers selectively cut some trees for the lumber companies, but most of the record-size trees still stand today along the trail. Not long after the beginning of the trail, a bouncy footbridge crosses over the Middle Prong where the water flows freely over some very large boulders. "The presence of black trees just across the foot bridge and many small, straight tulip-trees throughout the woods indicates that this area was cut over and probably farmed. When hiking along this trail, it is advisable to watch out for bald-faced hornet nests along the trail that hang just above head level. They look like gray paper cantaloupes. At one and a half miles you come to an old traffic circle where Ramsay Prong and Middle Prong meet. The Old Greenbrier Pinnacle trail used to start here, but it is difficult to follow because the park no longer maintains it.

Two themes to notice along this trail are big trees and exposed roots. In one part of the trail, you walk between two huge, straight tuliptrees, "as majestic as Roman columns." Near the end of the trail, it seems as if you are hiking 40 miles instead of 4; however, the waterfall is just a bit further (Defoe 476). A winding passageway through many boulders precedes the approach to Ramsay Cascades, which is rarely disputed as the most spectacular waterfall in the Park. The water that falls from the initial ledges of the waterfall briefly pools before falling over another ledge into the stream. "Eight times the water cascades as it descends this rocky staircase, rushing with reckless abandon to a violent end" (Wise 23). "Water splashes more than 90' from ledge to ledge, and the cool spray feels wonderful on a summer day." Ramsay Cascades is the highest waterfall accessible by trail in the park. Most of the water comes from Mount Guyot, two thousand feet higher (Defoe 477).

Experience along the Trail:

On the day I decided to hike this trail (actually, the entire route encompassed some 3 trails), it appeared as if I was going to have to embark on this 15 mile journey by myself. I was actually looking forward to it because I had heard the trail as well as the mountaintop views were very beautiful. However, because it had been a tiring week, I woke up very late to the ringing of my telephone. It was my best friend as well as best man in my wedding Brian Andrews. He knew I was planning to go hiking and asked if he could come along. I naturally said yes and met him at his apartment. We gathered all of our equipment and food and started towards Maryville and Townsend. We finally arrived at the trailhead, which is just off to the left side of the road that ends at Cades Cove. Unfortunately, since we had slept so late, it was after 2:00 P.M. when we finally began our journey. We started out on Lead Cove trail. This is actually a very steep trail that travels through a covered forest. Since it was during the heat of the day, we were glad the trail was covered and was so pleasant. The trail was marked by intricate systems of roots that were nearly completely exposed. It appeared as though the trail was very well worn and had been traveled often. Just after the beginning of the trail, we passed a small trail to the left known as Finley Cane Trail. We continued along the trail, making our way through all the roots as well as an increasing number of large rocks. With very little left of the trail (we knew it was only 1.8 miles long) my friend Brian felt as though his boots were rubbing a blister and decided he had to have some relief. He decided to try hiking on the trail barefooted as long as he could. The trail was actually quite soft near its terminus and the only obstacles in this portion of the trail were small roots. We made our way up the rest of the trail and to the junction with the Bote Mountain Trail. From a small hiking book I own, we knew that the trail would also be very

steep and rigorous; however, little did we know just how difficult it would be to hike. The trail was apparently used as a jeep trail at one time. It was very rocky and looked as if it had been built solely for the purpose of vehicles. There were leaves of all shades along the trail—pink, brown, orange, and even maroon. It was very beautiful. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the hike, we noticed that the camera was acting very strangely. We got out the camera to take pictures of the trail and the beautiful leaves and it simply died on us. We had an extra set of batteries and changed them. This did not help either. However, we knew it would be a great hike anyway and proceeded. Since the trail became very rocky and uneven, my friend Brian decided it would be best to put his boots back on. We continued along the steep, rocky trail for what seemed like an eternity. Portions of the wide trail were grown up considerably by all sorts of plants. Eventually, however, the trail narrowed at a turnaround, which ended jeep access. We continued along the still rocky trail and noticed a tremendous number of switchbacks as we climbed the mountain. A switchback is actually the way a trail looks as it climbs left, right, and then left again (or vice versa) up a ridge or mountain. After a couple of these, we were very tired and hoped we would meet our next trail soon. Much to our delight, we rounded a corner and saw another trail sign ahead of us. It was the Appalachian Trail. We sat down at the grassy beginning of the trail for a short water and snack break. To the right, the AT led to Spence Field, the largest grass bald in the park, and an AT shelter by the same name. To the left, the AT continues northeast towards Rocky Top and Thunderhead Mountain, ultimately ending in Baxter State Park in Maine. After our break we made our way to Spence Field. This was a beautiful place where it would be fun to throw frisbee and just have a picnic. We continued down a short trail to the shelter where hikers could spend the night. There were actually three people staying the night there and we sat and spoke with them briefly before we

decided to make our way back to the AT and towards Thunderhead Mountain. We continued along the AT past the junction with Bote Mountain Trail and towards our destination. The views after the junction were beautiful. It seemed as if we could see for miles into the mountains. We started the climb to Thunderhead Mountain, the highest peak in the Western end of the Park, as we entered a small thicket of woods. The climb did not start out too strenuous, but it quickly became that way. The trail was relatively smooth compared with other portions of the AT I have hiked. We knew we were going to hike about 1.5 miles to the summit, and about half way through we entered a clearing. It looked as though it was a small grassy bald and the trail continued through it straight uphill. This was one of the steepest portions of trail I have ever hiked. At the top of this summit, there was the most beautiful view I believe I have ever experienced in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. To the left I could see mountains, in the middle I could see Spence Field, and to the right I could see Cades Cove. The sky was completely clear and the views were majestic. We continued climbing along the trail, looking for two very famous landmarks—Rocky Top and Thunderhead Mountain. A short distance later we reached a group of large rocks that names had been carved into. Luckily, we had a guidebook with us that listed some of the things carved into the rocks. We had finally reached Rocky Top! The view was very good from this vantagepoint, but actually not as good as we had seen previously. We sat and enjoyed the nostalgia of the moment before continuing along the AT once more. We hiked just a short distance further again until we reached a marker on the ground that was obviously placed there to denote some significance. The mark was placed there by the US Geological Survey and denotes that the elevation there is 5,527' above sea level. You would expect that there is a great view from here, but that is not the case. The peak is covered by what is known as heath bald—rhododendrons everywhere. There was a

small stack of rocks there you could stand on and get a little view; however, it was hard to see anything but the highest peaks in the area. It was actually cool on top of the mountain and we knew we had a long return hike. We started down the AT towards Rocky Top and Spence Field. The trail was almost as difficult returning as it was coming because it was so steep. It was difficult to slow ourselves down because of the steep grade. We found ourselves at the junction with Bote Mountain Trail in what seemed like 10 minutes. We hiked down the rocky Bote Mountain Trail for 2.9 miles until we reached the Lead Cove Trail again. The hike down both of these trails was very difficult, but for different reasons. The Bote Mountain Trail was very difficult because many of the rocks along the trail were very unstable and would slide when you stepped on them. More than once I thought I might fall descending along this trail. Along the Lead Cove Trail, the difficulty was one of lack of vision. Since we had started the hike so late in the afternoon, it was getting very dark even as we started our descent. Along the Lead Cove Trail, we could barely see anything, which proved to be quite dangerous since the trail had so many exposed roots. Both of us tripped many times; however, we were fortunate to avoid any serious injury. We finally reached the Laurel Creek Road, which leads to the Cades Cove Recreational Area, and sat down on the tailgate of my truck to rest our bodies as well as our feet. Finally, we made our way home.

Supplemental Trail Information

"The Lead Cove trail shares a common trailhead with the Finley Cane Trail and, like its neighbor, was formerly a wagon road providing the farming community in Big Spring Cove access to the Anderson Road on Bote Mountain (Wise 140). "Soon after the beginning of the trail, the remains of an old chimney and stone foundation appear on the left. Dr. Randolph Shields, a native of Cades Cove, reported this to

have been the cabin of Gibson Tipton. The Tipton family is known for being some of the first white settlers in the cove (1821)" (Defoe 346). The Lead Cove Trail derives its name from the "galena, or lead ore, once extracted in small amounts from the area. Dr. Shields remembered having heard that one or more wagon loads were taken out during the Civil War. However, he didn't know the exact location of the ore bed" (Wise 140).

The Lead Cove Trail begins with a rough path bordering the Laurel Creek Road, but it transitions to a smooth, gentle trail. The trail was actually an old road through fields (former cropland) now reforested in Eastern hemlock, tuliptree, and mixed hardwoods. The trail really is a delightful path, especially in summer since it provides a tremendous amount of shade. This trail is a very popular route to Spence Field. An interesting point about this section of the park is that neither the Lead Cove or Finley Cane trails appear on the USGS Thunderhead quad map quadrant as they were abandoned (not maintained) from after WWII until around 1970, when they were re-opened (Defoe 346).

The Lead Cove Trail is part of a group of trails that provides a link between Tremont and Cades Cove. The trail was formerly sometimes called the Sandy Gap Trail, a reference to the landmark on Bote Mountain, near the area where the trail meets with the Bote Mountain Trail. The trail starts out relatively flat, but it begins to steepen as it moves out of the old farm fields and onto a course that runs along the Sugar Cove Prong. The trail takes a sharp left turn and begins the ascent up Sandy Gap. Near the gap, a break in the forest affords the only view along this trail. The view is restricted to the Laurel Creek valley and the Stone Mountain ridgeline (Wise 140).

The second trail we hiked along was Bote Mountain Trail. This trail has a long history, as portions of it were once used by James Spence, for whom Spence Field was named and who lived and farmed in the area for six months out of the year beginning in the early 1830's (Defoe 130). Additionally, "During the early 1830's, the Reverend Isaac Anderson, the first president of Maryville College, was retained to build a toll road from Tuckaleechee Cove to the top of the Smokies at Spence Field. He sought the advice of the Cherokee Indians, who were very familiar with the area, as to whether the road should follow along the ridge just east of Cades Cove or another ridge farther east." The Cherokees voted for the ridge near Cades Cove; however, because the Cherokee language has no sound for the letter "V," the closest being the sound for "B," the Indians voiced their consent with a "bote." Since that time the ridge has been known as Bote Mountain and the trail was so named. The ridge that was not chosen was dubbed Defeat Ridge. Isaac Anderson completed the road, which was mainly used by herders driving livestock to the grassy fields along the ridgeline. This road was known as the Anderson Road before the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established. With the creation of the Park and cessation of grazing on the highland meadows, the Anderson road was rehabilitated to a jeep track and adopted as the Bote Mountain Trail. (Wise 136).

The trail intersects the end of three trails: Finley Cane and Lead Cove, which begin at a common point on the Laurel Creek Road, and the Anthony Creek Trail, which begins at the Cades Cove picnic grounds. About a half mile beyond the junction with the Anthony Creek Trail, there is a turnaround for the jeeps that were used by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The trail was actually used a roadway at one time, which is evidenced by how wide it is. For a while in the late 1960's the public was permitted to drive to this turnaround, which made it a short walk to Spence Field.

Beyond the turnaround the trail continues west and becomes a trough. It was dug by thousands of cattle hooves going to and from the mountain meadows above during the years before the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The path becomes extremely rocky as it approaches the junction of Spence Field and the Appalachian Trail. The area where these two trails merge is considered by many to be the most beautiful part of the entire Park.

The area where Bote Mountain Trail and the Appalachian Trail meet is near the Spence Field shelter. This shelter has a good water source nearby as well as two new bear boxes for food storage. It is also recommended that one hangs his or her pack up even if it is kept inside the shelter. Oftentimes, mice will rummage through packs in search of food. Today Spence Field is merely a shadow of what it once was (Defoe 131). Prior to the creation of the Park, Spence Field was a tough, firm turf of mountain grass that was grazed extensively by cattle. It was originally much larger than it is today. Unless some drastic change is made, in time the field will be completely overgrown (Wise 219). However, at 30 acres, it is still the largest grass bald in the park. When James Spence herded livestock here, it was much larger though. "In the 1830's he cut and burned the surrounding forest opening to create more than 100 acres of pasture. Time has undone his work and slowly the forest returns" (Defoe 88).

As one continues along the Appalachian Trail towards the east and away from Spence Field, it starts to climb towards Rocky Top and Thunderhead Mountain. However, before the trail actually reaches Rocky Top, there is a large outcropping of boulders on which one can stand and take in a breathtaking view. The second rocky outcropping is known as Rocky Top. "The sandstone outcrops and boulders strewn

across this knob have been carved into for many years. Mother Nature did the first carving—rounding and smoothing the rocks. Later came the herders like Hop Harris and Red Waldron who indicated they were here more than seven times from 1889 to 1920.” Many people still stop and carve their names into the rocks, but the National Park Service strongly discourages this practice. After passing Rocky Top, there is still a short climb up to Thunderhead Mountain. Upon reaching the top of Thunderhead Mountain, one will notice there is not much of a view (Defoe 87). At one point, Thunderhead was a grassy bald kept clear by the cattle of herders. However, today it is largely overgrown and does not provide the sort of view one would expect from such a high peak. This is because the peak is covered with heath bald, or rhododendron (Wise 218). “A small stone pile allows you to climb enough to get your head above the shrubs and get a 360 degree view of the Park.” Thunderhead Mountain is the highest peak in the Western end of the Park at 5,527’ above sea level (Defoe 87).

Gregory Bald—10/20/00

Experience along the Trail:

I knew it was going to be getting cold as November approached, so I decided it would be best to finish the rest of the hikes in one weekend. On a Friday morning, my fiancée and I met and made our way to Cades Cove. We decided to go hiking because we didn’t think we would see much of anyone. Wow! We were sorely mistaken. It seemed everyone in East Tennessee had decided to go to Cades Cove and drive around the 11 mile loop. The Gregory Bald Trail is actually off of a road called Parson Branch Road—a gravel road off of the Cades Cove Loop. As we approached the Cades Cove Loop, we knew it could be slow going from all of the

traffic we were passing as we approached. We made it about 3 miles and then it was a standstill. It seemed as if none of the cars were moving. The bad thing about the loop is that it is a one-lane road and everyone on it stops at the sight of any wildlife—even a squirrel. After about an hour of idling, the cars began to move a little quicker and we were at our turnoff. We started down the one-lane road and towards our trail. The road was very rough and filled with holes. Large ruts were dug out of the road, making it difficult to climb hills. I put my truck in a lower gear and that seemed to solve the problem of our tires spinning. The Parson Branch Road is actually closed in winter, so we were lucky to finish this hike before the season changed. We continued down the road until finally we were at a trailhead. There was a small parking area that was full. The one parking spot was a makeshift one amongst the woods. We pulled up a hill into the spot and parked. The trailhead indicated it would be a nine-mile round trip hike. We grabbed my backpack and started up the trail. From the information I had found about the trail, I knew it was going to be uphill most of the way. We started up the trail and immediately noticed how many exposed roots there were. Although some of the trails I have done have been marked by their rockiness, this one was indicative of most of the trails I have hiked on the western side of the park. We climbed gradually for a good while, admiring the foliage as well as the small wildlife that came into view. About half way up the trail, we noticed something moving in the woods ahead of us. Those kinds of things always startle me when I am hiking, but it didn't seem too big. We crept up the trail just a bit further and discovered a deer. It was a buck with a good set of horns on it. It didn't seem to be startled by our presence, so we slowly got out the camera and snapped some pictures of it. Eventually, though, we heard some other deer in the woods and they all ran off together. With such an interesting experience behind us, we were all the more eager to continue on the trail in hopes of seeing

more wildlife or other interesting things. At the four mile mark, we saw backpacks hanging above the ground as well as tents. This was campsite # 13 and it was nearly full. Another interesting site along this trail was a sign placed by officials of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park stating that there had been bear activity in the area in the last couple of weeks. I found this pretty interesting, especially considering that there were numerous campers nearby. We continued up the trail and saw a trailhead noting that Gregory Bald was only half a mile further. This was a very steep portion of the trail that was also very muddy. It appeared to have rained very recently and the mudholes were very large. We climbed a final section and beheld an open field. It was a beautiful site, especially because it was so different from anything we had seen all day. We walked around the vast expanse that was this open field. Everything seemed to be a golden brown. The grass there was very soft and there were a few trees. From readings I had done in the past, I knew this was a spot for cattle grazing before the Park was established. The fields were very large and would be a great place for a picnic on a summer afternoon. We continued to wander around the fields and sat down under a tree to enjoy a snack. Since there was little cover provided at this high altitude, we crouched under a tree when eating. We enjoyed the short break this time afforded but knew we had to continue on. We started back down the trail and towards the campsite again. We stopped there to say hello to a few campers and were on our way. The steep grade on the way down made the hike back seem much shorter. It was actually getting quite cold as we made our way down the trail. We really didn't stop for much of anything on the way down. We had to be very careful because of all the roots on the trail. We were thankful to reach my truck less than two hours since we had been at the bald. We hopped in the truck and continued down the narrow Parson Branch Road. This road was pretty interesting because many times there were concrete slabs laid down on

portions of the road where water flowed over the road. The wilderness in this area is truly beautiful. Evidence that man has been there is somewhat meager compared to other areas of the Park. We finally reached the end of the road and turned onto US 129. This road leads to Maryville, Tennessee, but before that it travels through the Fontana Dam area. This is a part of Tennessee that I never knew existed. It was so remote and yet so clean and untouched. If it didn't seem like such a dead area, it might be a good place to visit. It seemed quite serene and antiquated. It was definitely a welcome change to the faster-paced city life. We eventually made our way back to Knoxville and were done for the day.

Supplemental Trail Information

"It is still insisted that there can be nothing finer than this trip to Gregory Bald in azalea time, and the ascent made my moonlight." Smoky Mountain Hiking Club bulletin, 1937

This trail is not as easily as accessible as most. It is off of Parson Branch Road, which is off of the Cades Cove Loop. "The Gregory Bald Trail begins at Sams Gap where the Parson Branch Road intersects Hannah Mountain" (Wise 165). The trail begins as a gentle grade through pine trees and eventually swings around to the east around Hannah Mountain. The trail is brightened by Catawba rhododendron in June. Along the trail, after ascending through a forest of mixed hardwoods predominated by northern red oaks, the trail reaches Panther Gap. This area is named for Panther Creek, whose headwaters form in oozing streams at various places along the path.

Another prominent area along this trail is Sheep Pen Gap. It is so named because it was used to gather sheep prior to the drive home in the fall. Since sheep and hogs ate acorns and chestnuts, they were left in the mountains longer than cattle (Defoe 259). "The trail reaches the stateline divide at Sheep Pen Gap, where it intersects the upper terminus of the Wolf Ridge Trail." At Sheep Pen Gap, the trail turns east and climbs half a mile to Gregory Bald (Wise 165). Campsite # 13 is 4.0 miles up Gregory Bald Trail and near Sheep Pen Gap. It is situated between two grassy balds and is frequently used. At a trail sign near the campsite, you reach the original Appalachian Trail, which went across Gregory and Parson Balds until 1948.

On the ascending trail towards the bald, the grade becomes considerably steeper. The bald is a broad grass meadow with blueberries that ripen in August. It is one of the most visited balds in all of the southern Appalachians (Defoe 260). "Gregory Bald is a ten-acre, dome-shaped grassland bordered on the North Carolina side by hundreds of sturdy azalea shrubs and once prized by cattle farmers as an upland grazing range." Many notable Cades Cove families herded in this area. There is long-standing speculation that Gregory Bald is a natural bald. However, there are some that believe that Russell Gregory cleared at least some of this area. Gregory Bald is famous for its mid-June displays of flame azaleas. The range of colors represented by the azaleas is breathtaking. Because of efforts to preserve some of the historic landscapes on the Smokies crest, the Park Service maintains Gregory as a bald. This is in contrast to what the Park Service is doing at Spence Field. From the field, it is possible to see into Cades Cove as well as Happy Valley and the Chilhowee range (Wise 167).

Experience along the Trail:

This was the third Saturday in October, which means only one thing in Big Orange Country—UT versus Alabama. After the hike at Gregory Bald, my legs and feet were very tired. However, I knew this would be the last hike and I had also heard great things about Mount Cammerer. I met up with my fiancée again on this day and we made our way towards an area called Cosby. It is close to a city called Newport that is about 25 miles from the North Carolina border. We traveled along some backroads and finally found our way to the Cosby campground. We parked the truck and searched for the trailhead. There were actually two separate ways to get to the AT and consequently Mount Cammerer, but we finally found the correct path. We chose to hike up the Low Gap Trail. Already a bit tired from the day before, we started up the path. We immediately passed a few groups of hikers who were enjoying the relatively cool, yet comfortable day. We crossed a stream on a bridge and continued on the covered trail. At the beginning of the trail, the soil of the trail was very dark and rich, and everything seemed a dark green. The area appeared to be a relatively damp area with plenty of precipitation. We continued along the covered trail until we came up on a group of horses. We said our hellos and passed them. Not too long into the hike we realized we were getting very tired. We stopped quite often for water and our legs ached with each step. The Low Gap Trail terminates at the Appalachian Trail 2.9 miles from where we began. This was a very tough three miles. The grade was very steep and the trail was also quite rocky. We saw a multitude of people on our way towards the Appalachian Trail and ultimately Mount Cammerer. We finally reached the AT and took another small break. Honestly, since we knew that the Alabama game was coming on at 3:30 P.M., we were trying to make it back in time for kickoff. We had started a little late and knew it

would be difficult to finish on time, so we were reserved to simply enjoy the day, especially because it was sunny and pleasant. After reaching the AT, the grade of the trail leveled off considerably. It was actually quite pleasant of a walk and we were able to enjoy some good conversation. We actually spoke about our future as well as the foods I liked. Since my fiancée is a family and consumer science graduate, she is very interested in cooking and looks forward to planning our meals. She simply wanted to know the kinds of food I would eat, especially since I tend to be a picky eater. After about 2 miles along the AT, we finally reached the Mount Cammerer Trail. This is a short trail that leads to the summit of the mountain. The climb is basically negligible, but climbing on a few rocks is necessary to reach the top. We started down this trail and noticed there was a horse tie off. There were three horses there and they were quite beautiful. We continued down the trail and were surrounded by some rhododendron—the type that was also found on the summit of Thunderhead Mountain. From a clearing in the rhododendron, we could see the fire tower atop the mountain. This tower of sorts is actually built into the side of the mountain. It is quite beautiful, so we decided to make our way to it. The views from the rocks around the tower were magnificent. The colors of the leaves on the trees below were innumerable. It seemed as though we were looking below us for miles. The tower was actually open and we decided to go inside. There was nothing inside except a small book that was left there for hikers to sign. We signed the book and admired the views for a few more minutes. We were definitely not the only people enjoying Mount Cammerer on this day. We were surrounded by all types of people—young, old, black, white, small, and large. It was very interesting because I never expected to see that many people hiking on a Saturday morning. It further emphasized to me how similar all of us humans are. Oftentimes we enjoy the simple, free things that the materialistic world can not provide. It was definitely an

enjoyable time. We decided that in order to make it back for most of the game, we should move on and make our way back to the Appalachian Trail and the Low Gap Trail. We returned to the AT and started our return journey. On our return journey, we crossed paths with most of the people we had already passed on our way up to Mount Cammerer. We said hello in most cases and descended along the rocky trail towards Low Gap. We reached the trailhead and started a very steep descent along the Low Gap Trail. Since the trail was so rocky, we had to be very careful on our way down. As we neared the bottom of the trail, we met a couple that was carrying a small dog. We stopped to speak with them and actually found out that the husband worked for Coca-Cola Enterprises. This was pretty interesting because this summer in Atlanta I worked at Ernst & Young, a public accounting firm that audits CCE. We had a great conversation with them and made our way down the rest of the trail, which ends at a rather large campground. We were finally done with the ten hikes, which was definitely a relief.

Supplemental Trail Information

The Low Gap trail is one of the oldest in the Smokies. Parts of the trail date back to the earliest settlements in the mountains when white pioneers began moving into Cosby Cove in Tennessee and Walnut Bottom on Big Creek in North Carolina. This trail is one of the most heavily used in the Smokies. It is a convenient path to the Appalachian Trail as well as the shortest and easiest way to Mount Cammerer (Wise 6). The Low Gap Trail offers a very short, but steep route to the Appalachian Trail. The trail begins at Cosby Campground—an area where three early settlers had their homes and the Mountain Grove School was located (Defoe 374). Low Gap is one of the lowest points along the eastern divide of the Smokies. Because of its close proximity to Walnut Bottom and Cosby, this trail was used as a transmountain pass

connecting the two communities (Wise 6). Near the trailhead was the site of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp, in operation nearly five years during the 1930s. The entire length of this trail was constructed by Company 1462's 212 members in 1934 (Defoe 374).

The beginning of the trail ascends through a gated road and passes water supply reservoirs at 0.6 miles. Near the beginning of the trail there is also a small cascade that spans the Cosby Creek. This stream is closed to fishing in order to protect the native brook trout that inhabit the upper portions of it. The trail ascends very steeply and usually parallels Cosby Creek. At 1.8 miles up the trail, a small boulder field lies left of the trail. Many such boulder fields were created during the last Ice Age (lasting until 15000-20000 years ago) when extreme freezing and thawing crumbled rock faces. "Geologists believe that during this period, the highest elevations of the Smokies were above timberline." There is a distinct change in the forest type at 2.2 miles. It transitions to a closed oak forest. The rest of the trail continues to be very steep, yet it is rather pleasant (Defoe 376).

At 4,242', Low Gap is the lowest elevation on the Appalachian Trail since Big Abrams Gap near Spence Field, 50 miles south. Low Gap is very wide with many yellow birch and American beech trees. "Low Gap is a natural break in the Smokies' main ridge, and separates it from Mount Cammerer." Walking along this portion of the Appalachian Trail is rather pleasant, since the trail follows the nearly level ridge. After only about 2.1 miles, a side trail called Mount Cammerer Trail appears and leads to the summit of the mountain. The Mount Cammerer Trail is considered an essential side hike for every Appalachian Trail hiker. This trail switches through some rocks and approaches a hitch rack where horses are to be left. "An impressive

sandstone outcrop shelters the hitching area.” After climbing a series of rocks, a small section of rhododendron engulfs the views from the trail. From here, the summit and lookout tower come into view.

The summit of Mount Cammerer provides a great 360 degree view that is well worth the hike. “The historic stone fire tower adds a medieval quality to this already engaging scene. The Civilian Conservation Corps constructed the tower in the late 1930s, soon after completion of the trail. Built according to the “Yosemite model” of fire towers common in western states, the CCC used native timber and stone” (Defoe 414). “In 1995 the Park Service restored the tower to its original state and continues to maintain it as a historic landscape” (Wise 208).

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